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SUSPENSTORIES

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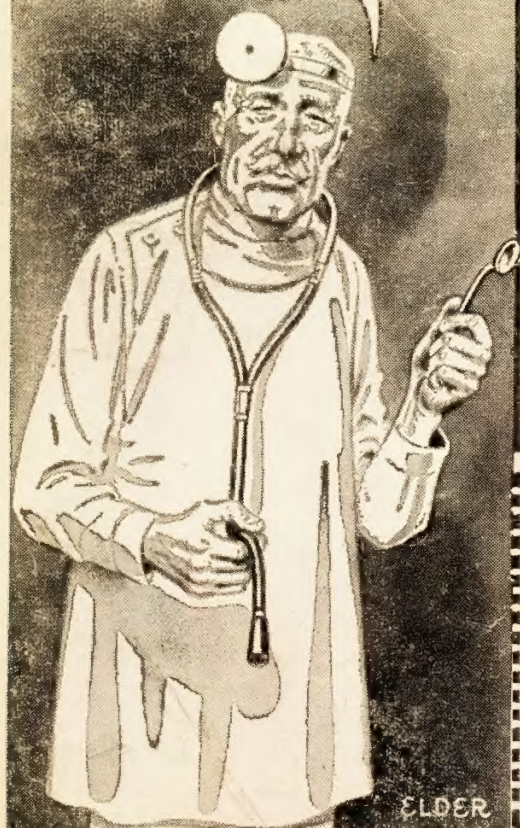


TRADITION!



PROOF... OF 8 BRANDS TESTED, PANIC IS BEST IMITATION OF MAD

YES, EXTENSIVE TESTS BY
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HAVE PROVEN CONCLUSIVELY
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4-SIDED TRIANGLE

IT WAS AUTUMN'S FIRST NIGHT, TOO EARLY FOR EVEN A TRACE OF FROST ON THE RIPENING PUMPKINS THAT GLOWED IN THE FIELDS LIKE ORANGE LANTERNS BENEATH THE PALE MOON. A FAINT BREEZE STIRRED, WAFTING A WARM SCENT OF NEW-MOWN HAY INTO THE FARMHOUSE KITCHEN WHERE THE HIRED GIRL BUSIED HERSELF WITH THE SUPPER DISHES AND THE FARMER SAT, TAKING HIS EASE AT THE WOODEN TABLE, SUCKING LAZILY AT HIS CORN-COB PIPE. IT WAS ON THAT VERY NIGHT THAT ABNER YATES FIRST NOTICED THINGS ABOUT ANNIE. POOR, PRETTY ANNIE. HALF-WITTED ANNIE. HOW SUDDENLY SHE HAD BLOSSOMED. PEACH-LIKE. FULL-RIPENED, LIKE FRUIT CRYING TO BE PICKED AND ENJOYED. THIS ABNER NOTICED AND IT WHETTED A LONG-DENIED APPETITE WITHIN HIM...

ANNIE, COME HERE, GIRL...

HUH? MISS HESTER... SHE SAYS, "ANNIE, YOU GET THE DISHES DONE!" SO I GOTTA GET THE DISHES DONE, MIST' ABNER...

IT TOOK HOLD OF ABNER THEN... A MADDENING DEEP-FELT COMPULSION. HE ROSE SLOWLY, CAME UP BEHIND ANNIE, AND PRESSED HUNGRY LIPS AGAINST HER NECK... HIS HARSH, BRISTLED CHIN NUZZLING THE SOFT FLESH OF HER WHITE SHOULDER... HIS HARD, CALLOUSED HANDS CARESSING...

GASP... MIST' ABNER! WHAT'RE YUH DOIN'? DON'T, MIST' ABNER! PLEASE...

ANNIE...



WITH THE STRENGTH BORN OF YEARS OF HARD WORK, ANNIS LOOSENED HIS GRIP AND SLIPPED FROM HIS GRASP. SHE TURNED, HER PUZZLED BLUE EYES WONDERING AT HIS SCOWLING FACE. ABNER BREATHED HARD BUT SPOKE SOFTLY, TRYING TO MAKE HER UNDERSTAND... TRYING TO PENETRATE HER HALF-WITTED MIND...

I LIKE YOU, ANNIE! WHY'D YUH 'T AIN'T NO HARM IN BEIN' A MITE FRIENDLY! I MIS' HESTER BEEN GOOD T'YOU ALL THESE YEARS, AIN'T I? WOULDNT' LIKE YOU T'DO THET!

ABNER GRINNED, TRYING TO HIDE HIS CONCERN...

OH, NOW Y'AIN'T GOIN' T' TELL HESTER, ANNIE. I'M JUST TRYIN' T'BE FRIENDLY!

I GOT A FRIEND, MIST' ABNER. AN' HE DON'T DO THET!

WHAT YOU MEAN, YOU GOT A FRIEND!? YOU DON'T NEVER LEAVE THIS FARM! THE CLOSEST FOLKS'RE FOUR MILES OFF. AND THEY GOT NO YOUNG MEN THERE...

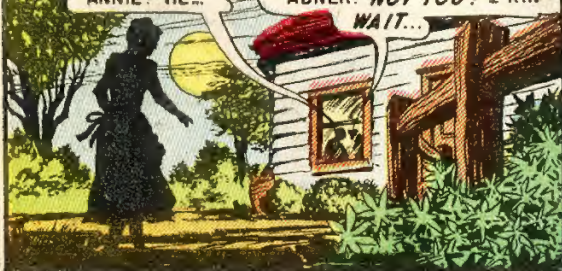
I GOT A FRIEND, MIST' ABNER... AN' HE DON'T DO THET! I WANT HE SHOULD... BUT HE DON'T!



HESTER YATES, OLD BEFORE HER TIME AND UNABLE TO UNDERSTAND OR ACCOMODATE HER HUSBAND'S NEEDS ANY LONGER, MOVED' UP THE WELL-WORN PATH TO THE KITCHEN DOOR...

THEN, HE'S A FOOL, ANNIE! HE...

IT'S HIM I WANT, MIST' ABNER! NOT YOU! I KIN WAIT...



YOU TWO STILL IN TH' KITCHEN? WHAT'RE YOU TALKIN' 'BOUT, ANNIE?

'BOUT NUTHIN', HESTER! JUS' TALK! I...



I DIDN'T ASK YOU, ABNER! I ASKED ANNIE! WHAT WERE YOU AN' MIST' ABNER TALKIN' 'BOUT, ANNIE?

I TOL' HIM I DON'T WANT HIM GETTIN' FRIENDLY 'CAUSE I ALREADY GOT A FRIEND, MIS' HESTER!



WHAT YOU MEAN, ANNIE... 'GETTIN' FRIENDLY'? WHAT'D MIST' ABNER DO?

TARNATION, HESTER! Y'KNOW ANNIE'S GOT A FEEBLE MIND! SHE'S JUS' BRAGGIN' 'BOUT SOME BOYFRIEND SHE THINKS SHE'S GOT...

I DO GOT HIM... I DO!





LATER, WHILE HESTER SNORED RHYTHMICALLY AND DEEPLY, ABNER LAY BESIDE HER, HIS BODY TAUT AND ANXIOUS, HIS MIND DISTURBED AND RESTLESS. HE THOUGHT OF ANNIE IN HER ROOM. ANNIE...ANNIE. HER NAME SCREAMED IN HIS MIND. HE WENT TO HER IN HIS MIND AND WAS WITH HER IN HIS MIND...

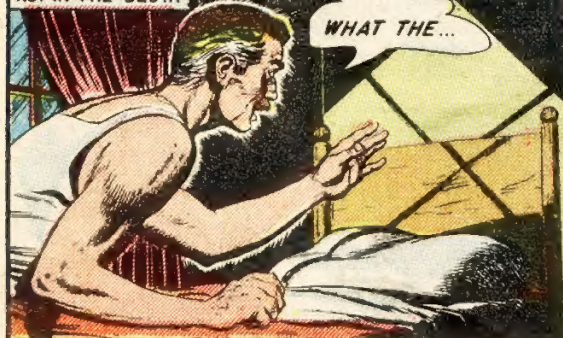


AND SUDDENLY ABNER COULD STAND IT NO LONGER!

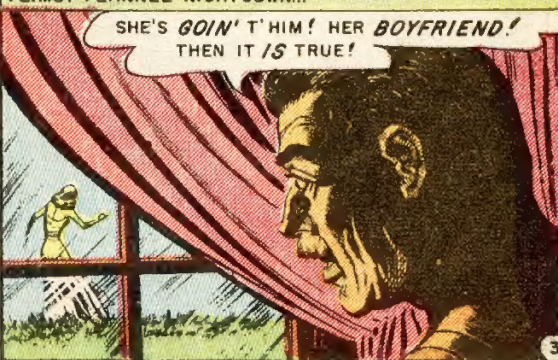
HESTER SLEPT SOUNDLY, NOT KNOWING...NOT HEARING... NOT HEARING HER MAN RISE FROM THEIR BED AND MOVE STEALTHILY THROUGH THE HALL TO THEIR HALF-WITTED SERVANT'S ROOM. SHE DID NOT HEAR HER HUSBAND'S TREMBLING HANDS FIND THE DOORKNOB IN THE DARK... TWIST IT... SWING THE DOOR WIDE...



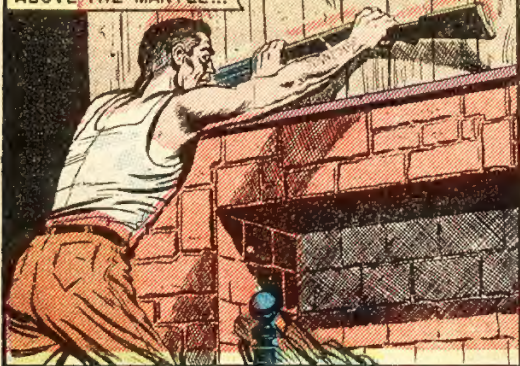
THE WARM AUTUMN NIGHT BREEZE COMING IN THE OPEN WINDOW BLEW ACROSS ANNIE'S BED, CARRYING THE EXCITING SCENT OF HER RIPE YOUNG BODY TO ABNER. BUT ABNER'S SENSES HAD DECEIVED HIM, FOR ANNIE WAS NOT IN THE BED...



A MOVEMENT OUTSIDE IN THE MOONLIT FARMYARD CAUGHT ABNER'S EYE. ANNIE WAS OUT THERE, CUTTING ACROSS TO THE FIELDS BEYOND, CLAD ONLY IN HER FLIMSY FLANNEL NIGHTGOWN...



ABNER SEETHED WITH FRUSTRATION AND JEALOUSY. HE CREEPT BACK THROUGH THE HALL, PAST HESTER'S INNOCENT SNORING, AND INTO THE LIVING ROOM. HE REMOVED THE LOADED SHOTGUN FROM ABOVE THE MANTLE...



... AND WENT OUT INTO THE NIGHT. FAINT IDIOTIC LAUGHTER DRIFTED TO HIM ON THE WIND. HE FOLLOWED THE SOUND OF HER GUTTERAL VOICE WHISPERING IN THE MOONLIGHT. AND THEN HE CAME UPON THE GIRL AND HER LOVER, AND HIS ANGER TURNED TO TRIUMPHANT GLEE...



HAH! I MIGHT'VE *KNOWN* THAT'S HOW IT'D BE WITH THE POOR SIMPLE-MINDED FOOL!

ANNIE STOOD BEFORE HER LOVER, TEMPTING HIM WITH HER SWAYING BODY, PLEADING WITH HIM, MOANING WITH PASSION. BUT ANNIE'S LOVER DID NOT RESPOND. ANNIE'S LOVER WAS A RAGGED LIFELESS COLD SCARECROW...



ABNER DRANK IN ANNIE'S HEATED AGITATION WHILE HIS OWN CRAVING MOUNTED TO A FEVER PITCH. HE TORE HER FROM HER INHUMAN LOVER AND CRUSHED HIS LIPS TO HERS, HIS BODY TO HERS.



ANNIE WRENCHED HERSELF FROM ABNER'S STARVING ARMS, HER ARDOR QUICKLY COOLED...

YOU CAN'T HAVE ME, MIST' ABNER! YOU GOT MIS' HESTER! THIS HERE'S MY MAN!

HE AIN'T REAL, ANNIE! HE'S JUS' RAG N' STRAW N' A POLE STUCK IN THE GROUND. HE CAN'T HELP YOU NONE!



HE CAN HELP ME! HE WILL! SOMEDAY! SOMEDAY...

Y'LITTLE IDIOT! HE AIN'T A FLESH AN' BLOOD MAN LIKE ME! LE'ME HELP YOU, ANNIE? LE'ME...



SHE COWERED AGAINST HER STRAW LOVER, SOBBING...

LE'ME BE, MIST' ABNER! LE'ME BE OR I'LL TELL MIS' HESTER!

NO! DON'T TELL HER, ANNIE! IT'D JUS MAKE TROUBLE. SHE...SHE'D SEND YOU AWAY FROM HERE! I DON'T WANT THAT...



FRUSTRATED, YET FEARFUL OF HESTER'S WRATH, ABNER RELUCTANTLY RETURNED TO THE FARMHOUSE...

THAT YOU, ABNER?
WHERE Y'BEEN?

I...I HEARD A CRITTER OUT-
SIDE WORRYIN' THE STOCK.
I GOT ME M'GUN BUT I DIDN'T
SEE NUTHIN'!



HESTER LOOKED OUT TO SEE ANNIE COMING IN ACROSS THE FARMYARD...

THERE'S YER CRITTER,
ABNER. ANNIE... COMIN' BACK
FROM MEETIN' UP WITH HER
FELLER!

DRA! THAT
HALF-WIT GIRL...
DISTURBIN' M'
REST!



YES, ANNIE *DID* DISTURB ABNER'S REST. EVEN AFTER HESTER HAD FALLEN BACK TO SLEEP, HE LAY AWAKE FOR HOURS, TORTURED WITH UNSATIATED YEARNING, RESENTING THE AGONIZED PASSION ANNIE WASTED ON THE UNFEELING SCARECROW THAT COULD NEVER CLAIM HER...

I...I GOT TO HAVE HER!
I GOT TO!



BUT SLEEP CAME AT LAST...AND RESTLESS DREAMING... THEN MORNING AND THE DAYS WORK BEGAN. ABNER WENT ABOUT DOING HIS CHORES, STOPPING OFTEN TO SCOWL AT HIS INSENSATE RIVAL...

STUPID FOOL...WAITIN' FOR A
SCARECROW...



WHENEVER ANNIE WAS NEAR, ABNER DRANK HER IN WITH HIS EYES. HE FEASTED ON EVERY MINUTE CURVE OF HER SHAPELY BODY...THE RIPPLING RHYTHM WHEN SHE WALKED...

SUCH A *BLASTED*
WASTE...



SOMETIMES THEIR EYES WOULD MEET AND HE'D LOOK INTO HERS WITH URGENCY...AND SEE IN THEM ONLY SIMPLE-MINDED INDIFFERENCE...

T'AIN'T NO USE! SHE'S
TOO STUPID TO UNDER-
STAND!



BUT ABNER WAS NOT THE *ONLY* ONE WHO STUDIED ANNIE THAT DAY. HESTER, TOO, FOLLOWED THE GIRL'S MOVEMENTS ABOUT THE FARM...AND HESTER, TOO, WAS CONCERNED...

...TOO STUPID TO
UNDERSTAND!



BY BEDTIME THAT NIGHT, ABNER'S NEED HAD BECOME UNBEARABLE. HE SAT ON HIS SIDE OF THE BED, UNDRRESSING...AND THE SAGGING CAUSED BY HESTER'S SHAPELESS BULK, THE UNFEMININE RING OF HER VOICE, ALL SERVED TO IRRITATE HIM...

HOPE THERE'LL BE NO CRITTER DISTURBIN' YOUR REST T'NIGHT, ABNER.

AW, GO T'SLEEP, HESTER. I'LL DO THE WORRYIN' OVER THE LIVE-STOCK!



WHEN HESTER'S HEAVY BREATHING TOLD ABNER THAT SHE WAS ASLEEP, HE GOT OUT OF BED...



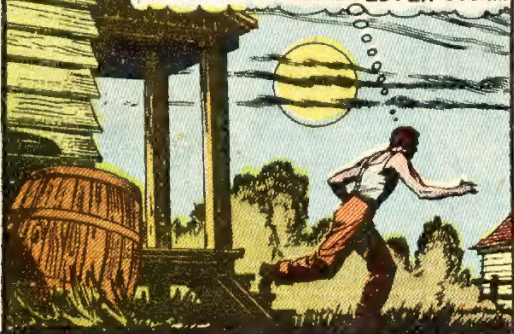
...AND TIP-TOED DOWN THE HALL TO ANNIE'S DOOR. HE HESITATED, LISTENING. HE COULD HEAR HER IN THERE, RESTLESS...TORMENTED... LIKE HIMSELF...

MAYBE SHE'LL SCREAM IF I GO IN... SCREAM AN' WAKE HESTER...



SUDDENLY, A PLAN FORMED IN ABNER'S TORTURED MIND...A MADDENING PLAN. HE SLIPPED BACK DOWN THE HALL AND OUT OF THE HOUSE...

FROM THE SOUND OF HER, SHE'LL BE COMIN' OUT TO HER LOVER SOON...



SO ABNER HID HIMSELF AND WAITED, AND BEFORE LONG, HE SAW ANNIE COME FROM THE FARMHOUSE...HER FLANNEL NIGHT-GOWN FLOWING BACK AS SHE RAN IN WILD HASTE, REVEALING HER YOUNG BODY...THE MOONLIGHT GLISTENING ON HER GOLDEN HAIR...



ANNIE THREW HERSELF UPON THE SCARECROW... THE COLD, UNYIELDING LOVER...WITH COMPLETE ABANDON. SHE PLEADED, PANTING, DELIRIOUS IN HER QUEST...



HOW LONG WOULD THIS UNWILLING CREATURE DEPRIVE HER? HOW LONG THIS CRUEL NEGLECT? HOW LONG? THE ANSWER CAME SUDDENLY...STARTLINGLY... SHOCKINGLY. NO LONGER! NOW! NOW!



HESTER WAS STARTLED OUT OF HER SLEEP BY NOTHING MORE, PERHAPS, THAN HER OWN STENTORIAN SNORES. OR WAS IT ANNIE'S DELIGHTED CRY THAT DRIFTED THROUGH THE NIGHT AIR? SHE WAS AWAKE, MISSING HER HUSBAND, CALLING HIM ...

ABNER? ABNER!



A WILD CRAZY THOUGHT FLASHED THROUGH HESTER'S BRAIN. SHE HURRIED TO ANNIE'S ROOM, FEARING THE WORST...

WHAT A FOOL I'VE BEEN!



... FLUNG OPEN THE DOOR...

SHE'S GONE!
THEY'RE BOTH GONE!
THEY'VE RUN OFF
TOGETHER!



OUT IN THE FIELDS, ANNIE CLASPED HER ARMS AROUND THE SCARECROW'S NECK. THIS WAS HER LOVER! HOW TRUE HER LOVER! HOW GOOD HER LOVER! THE STRAW MAN ... THE STICK AND RAG MAN ... WAS *HERS* AT LAST...



THE SOFT ZEPHYR THAT SWAYED THE GRASSES CARRIED IMPASSIONED SOUNDS TO HESTER'S EARS. SO THEY WERE *NOT* GONE AFTER ALL! THEY WERE *THERE*... OUT THERE IN THE *FIELDS*...

SO THAT'S IT! ABNER! HE'S ANNIE'S BOYFRIEND! HE'S THE ONE SHE'S BEEN MEETING!



HESTER SNATCHED UP THE PITCHFORK THAT LEANED AGAINST THE CLAPBOARD SIDING OF THE FARMHOUSE AS SHE CAME OUT OF THE DOOR...

WELL, I'LL TEACH 'EM...
BOTH OF 'EM!



ANNIE'S TEMPLES THROBBED, AND BODYLESS VOICES SCREAMED IN HER EARS. IT WAS ALL MADNESS NOW AS THIS STRAW-AND-CLOTH LOVER CARRIED HER HIGH... LIFTED HER TO THE RISING MOON. AND THEN, SHE LAY AT HIS FEET SMILING UP AT HIM, WHILE ALL ABOUT, THE TALL GRASSES SWAYED IN THE SOFT, WARM, SPENT BREEZE...



HESTER FOUND ANNIE WITH HER ARMS AROUND THE SCARECROW'S KNEES, KISSING ITS THREADBARE TROUSERS AND WHISPERING OVER AND OVER AGAIN...

I LOVE YOU!
I LOVE YOU!
I LOVE YOU!

CHOKE...
ANNIE...



HESTER FELT SUDDENLY SICK! SHE HAD THOUGHT **FOUL THINGS** OF HER HUSBAND... THOUGHT **FOUL THINGS** OF THIS POOR HALF-WITTED SIMPLE GIRL...

OH, MIS' HESTER!
IT'S YOU!

ANNIE! WHAT
...WHAT ARE
YOU DOIN',
CHILD?



ANNIE'S EYES WERE FILLED WITH STARLIGHT. SHE GAZED AT THE STIFF, MOTIONLESS SCARECROW...

I TOL' YOU 'BOUT HIM, MIS' HESTER! I TOL' YOU I HAD A BOYFRIEND!

ANNIE! YOU POOR DEAR! THIS IS A SCARE-CROW! IT'S NOTHIN' BUT STICKS AND STRAW!



ANNIE TURNED... ANGRY... HER EYES FILLING WITH TEARS.

NO! NO! HE LOVES ME! HE SHOWED ME T'NIGHT! HE SHOWED ME...

NO, ANNIE! HE COULDN'T! LOOK! I'LL SHOW YOU! HE'S STRAW! STRAW!



HESTER DROVE THE PITCHFORK DEEP INTO THE SCARECROW'S CHEST... ITS MIDDLE... ITS LEGS... AGAIN AND AGAIN! ANNIE SHRIEKED...

NO! NO! YOU'LL KILL HIM!

HE NEVER WAS ALIVE, ANNIE! HE'S STRAW! SEE? SEE?



HESTER STOPPED LANCING THE SCARECROW AND STARED IN HORROR AT THE SCARLET LIQUID THAT OZZED FROM EACH JAGGED RENT SHE'D TORN IN ITS CLOTHES WITH THE PITCHFORK. ANNIE SOBBED...

YOU SAID HE WASN'T ALIVE! YOU SAID...

MY GOD! HE'S BLEEDING! HE'S...



...AND THEN, THE TWO WOMEN SCREAMED AS ABNER YATES TOPPLED OUT OF THE SCARECROW... DEAD...

CHOKE...

GOOD LORD!



THE END

IN CHARACTER

THE TINKLING OF DAZZLING SILVERWARE AND FINE CRYSTAL GLASSES AND EXPENSIVE CHINA WERE THE ONLY SOUNDS HEARD IN THE LAVISHLY DECORATED EXECUTIVE DINING ROOM OF MAGNUS PICTURES, INC. POMPOUS, OVERDRESSED, OVERFED MEN, LONG USED TO THE INDULGENCES AND LUXURIES OF WEALTH AND SUCCESS, STOPPED THEIR BRAGGING PRATTLE ABOUT SWIMMING POOLS AND CADILLAC CARS AND ULCER DIETS AND TURNED INDIFFERENT EYES TO THE SPEAKER'S CHAIR. LAWRENCE B. MAYNOR, PRESIDENT OF MAGNUS PICTURES, STOOD STIFFLY, CLEARING HIS THROAT, AND SMILING DOWN AT THE MILD-MANNERED, SELF-CONSCIOUS, AGING MAN SEATED AT HIS RIGHT. HE HELD UP THE SIMPLE GOLD WATCH. THERE WAS A SCATTERING OF HALF-HEARTED APPLAUSE. HE BEGAN TO READ THE MESSAGE ENGRAVED IN THE COLD METAL BACK...

"TO BELA KARDIFF, IN MEMORY OF A FABULOUS ERA, FROM THE EXECUTIVE STAFF OF MAGNUS PICTURES, INC. JUNE 4, 1954..."



BELA KARDIFF ROSE SLOWLY TO ACCEPT THIS TOKEN OF APPRECIATION TENDED HIM AT THIS TESTIMONIAL DINNER, HIS SAD EYES DIMMED WITH TEARS. HE TOOK THE GLITTERING WATCH IN HIS SENSUOUS HANDS AND READ AND REREAD THE INSCRIPTION. THEN HE LOOKED AT THE MEN SEATED AROUND THE SMALL HORSESHOE-SHAPED TABLE. HIS VOICE WAS BARELY AUDIBLE AS HE BEGAN TO SPEAK...



I... I WANT TO *THANK* YOU ALL FOR *HONORING* ME HERE TONIGHT... FOR THIS *DINNER*... THIS *WATCH*... FOR MY *WHOLE CAREER*...

HE PLACED THE WATCH ON THE TABLE AND HESITATED, AS IF CONTEMPLATING HIS NEXT WORDS. THEN HE PICKED UP THE LARGE BOTTLE OF CHAMPAGNE BEFORE HIM...

I WOULD LIKE TO PROPOSE A *TOAST*... A TOAST THAT SAYS *THANK YOU* FOR ALL THAT YOU HAVE *DONE* FOR ME...



THE CHAMPAGNE CORK POPPED LOUDLY AS BELA YANKED IT FROM THE BOTTLE NECK. HE TURNED AND BEGAN TO WALK BEHIND THE MEN SEATED AT THE TABLE...

PERHAPS **CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER** WOULD BE THE **BEST** WAY TO MAKE THIS TOAST...SO I'LL START WITH THE **FIRST** OF YOU THAT I EVER KNEW...



THE TALL, MILD-MANNERED MAN STOPPED AND SLOWLY POURED A GLASS OF CHAMPAGNE...

TO **DON MULLER...MY AGENT...** WHO **DISCOVERED** ME AND FIRST STARTED ME DOWN THE ROAD TO **FORTUNE AND SUCCESS...**



DON MULLER SMILED SELF-CONSCIOUSLY AS BELA KARDIFF LOOKED DOWN AT HIM...

REMEMBER, DON? REMEMBER THE LEAN DAYS BEFORE I BECAME A STAR. REMEMBER HOW I USED TO COME TO YOUR OFFICE EACH DAY...BEGGING...BEGGING FOR WORK...



'...AND YOU WOULD SHAKE YOUR HEAD...'

SORRY, BELA! NOTHING FOR YOU! I'M TRYING...HONEST... BUT NOBODY WANTS AN **ENGLISH-PROFESSOR-TYPE** THESE DAYS. THEY'RE LOOKING FOR **GANGSTER-TYPES...**OR DASHING **HERO-TYPES...MUSCLE MEN...**

A **BUTLER** ROLE...AN **ELEVATOR OPERATOR...** A **WAITER...ANYTHING.** I **I'M FLAT BROKE, DON...**



'REMEMBER THE MORNING THAT CALL FROM MAGNUS CAME IN...HOW YOU LISTENED AND NODDED AND LOOKED AT ME ALL THE WHILE?..'

TALL, EH? AN UNKNOWN? OH...A MAKE-UP PART. SURE. YEAH, LARRY. A WHAT?! WELL, I...I...**WAIT, LARRY! LISTEN, I GOT JUST THE GUY YOU'RE LOOKIN' FOR!** I'LL SEND 'IM DOWN!



'REMEMBER HOW YOU HUNG UP AND TURNED TO ME..'

LOOK, BELA! I GOT A PART FOR YOU! IT'S A **BIG PART!** **GOOD MONEY! A CHANCE!** IT'S NOT WHAT YOU'D WANT, BUT IT COULD BE A **BEGINNING!**

I'LL TAKE IT, DON! I'LL TAKE ANYTHING!



MAGNUS PICTURES IS TAKING A FLYER ON A **NEW GIMMICK...HORROR MOVIES!** THEY'RE GOING TO DO A **HOLLYWOOD VERSION OF "FRANKENSTEIN!"** THEY'RE LOOKING FOR SOMEBODY TO PLAY THE **MONSTER!**

A...A **MONSTER!** BUT I... I...



'REMEMBER HOW YOU DELIVERED YOUR ULTIMATUM, DON?..'

LOOK, BELA. YOU OWE ME A **NICE HUNK OF DOUGH!** EITHER YOU **TAKE** THIS PART, OR I **DROP YOU GOLD!**



BELA RETURNED TO THE SPEAKER'S CHAIR...TO LAWRENCE B. MAYNOR, PRESIDENT OF MAGNUS PICTURES. HE FILLED HIS CHAMPAGNE GLASS SLOWLY...



REMEMBER THAT, LARRY? YOU WERE JUST A **CASTING DIRECTOR** THEN. YOU WERE ONLY **PART-WAY** UP THE LADDER TO THE TOP!

'REMEMBER HOW I CAME TO YOU?'

DON MULLER SENT ME OVER! I... I'VE COME TO AUDITION FOR THE '**MONSTER**' ROLE. WHAT SHALL I READ?...



READ!? THERE IS **NOTHING** TO READ! THIS IS A **HOLLYWOOD** VERSION OF THE **SHELLEY BOOK**. THE MONSTER DOES NOT **TALK** IN OUR VERSION!

BUT...I...I'M AN **ACTOR**! IF THERE ARE NO **LINES**, I **DON'T** THINK I'D...



LISTEN, WHATEVER YOUR NAME IS! MAGNUS PICTURES IS **ON THE ROCKS**. ONE MORE **FLOP** AND WE'RE **BANKRUPT**! SO WE'RE GONNA PRODUCE A **MONEYMAKER**. ...A **HORROR PICTURE** TO **END ALL HORROR PICTURES**. IF YOU WANT THE PART...**OKAY**. IF **NOT**...I'LL GET **SOMEBODY ELSE**!

BELA MOVED DOWN THE TABLE ...POURED ANOTHER GLASS OF CHAMPAGNE...



SO I **TOOK** THE PART! MY **STOMACH** SCREAMED **LOUDER** THAN MY **PRIDE**! AND THAT'S WHEN I MET **YOU, MARCEL DUVAL**. YOU WERE THE **MAKE-UP MAN**. REMEMBER HOW YOU LOOKED ME OVER?...

SUCH A **MILD-LOOKING MAN** I MUST MAKE **HORRIBLE**!? I AM NO PRODUCER OF **MIRACLES**, MAYNOR!

HE'S GOT THE **HEIGHT**, DUVAL! DO THE BEST YOU CAN!



'REMEMBER HOW YOU WORKED ON ME, MARCEL...CREATING A MONSTER WITH GREASEPAINT AND PUTTY AND ADHESIVE CEMENT...HIDING THE MILD-MANNERED MAN BEHIND A MASK OF HORROR...'



VOILA!

TERRIFIC, MARCEL! TERRIFIC!

BELA POURED ANOTHER GLASS...

AND, YOU, GEORGE ROBINS. IT WAS YOU WHO DREAMED UP THE **FANTASTIC SCHEME**...



WE'LL **PLAY UP THE MONSTER**, SEE! WE'LL BILL HIM AS THE **STAR**... THIS **KARDIFF GUY**! WE'LL TELL THE PUBLIC HE'S THE MOST **HORRIBLE THING** THAT EVER WALKED ACROSS A **MOVIE SCREEN**...



WE'LL HAVE AN **AMBU-LANCE** PARKED OUTSIDE THE **THEATER** ON **PREVIEW NIGHT**! WE'LL HAVE PEOPLE **SCARED** BEFORE THEY EVEN GO IN!



IT'LL EITHER GO OVER WITH A **BANG**... OR LAY A **BIG EGG**!

BELA MOVED ON, STOPPING AT THE CHAIR OF SIDNEY CHASE, TREASURER OF MAGNUS PICTURES...

"FRANKENSTEIN" DIDN'T LAY AN EGG, DID IT, SID? IT WAS A BIG HIT! IT MADE THREE TIMES ITS INITIAL INVESTMENT, DIDN'T IT?



'AND THE PUBLIC CLAMORED FOR MORE. THEY CLAMORED FOR MORE OF THIS FRIGHTENING HORRIBLE STAR YOU'D DISCOVERED...

HE'S A GOLD MINE! WE'VE GOT TO MAKE MORE HORROR PICTURES WITH KARDIFF!

LISTEN! ANOTHER NOVEL MIGHT BE THE ANSWER! HOW ABOUT DRACULA?



'FIRST, A MAN-MADE MONSTER... NEXT A VAMPIRE. AFTER DRACULA OPENED, MY NAME BECAME SYNONYMOUS WITH HORROR AND MAYHEM AND DEATH. ME, BELA KARDIFF... HARMLESS, QUIET, MILD-MANNERED BELA KARDIFF...

LOOK, MAMA! IT'S HIM! OOOOH!

YOU... YOU OUGHT TO BE ASHAMED OF YOURSELF... GOING AROUND FRIGHTENING CHILDREN!



'I TRIED TO STOP THIS MAD AVALANCHE THAT HAD CAUGHT ME UP IN ITS WILD DOWNHILL PLUNGE. REMEMBER, MILTON?...

GIVE ME A CHANCE AT A DECENT DRAMATIC PART, MILT. I BEG OF YOU. I DON'T WANT TO BE TYPED LIKE THIS!

LOOK, BELA. I'M ONLY A PRODUCER. I DO WHAT THE BOYS UPSTAIRS TELL ME. YOUR NEXT PICTURE IS THE MUMMY'S HAND!



'I WAS A MUMMY... A WEREWOLF... A ZOMBIE... EVERYTHING SINISTER AND DESPICABLE AND UGLY. I MURDERED AGAIN AND AGAIN ON THE SCREEN...

YOU'LL KNOCK 'EM DEAD IN THIS SCENE, BELA!

YES! I... SUPPOSE SO... ANOTHER HIT, L.B.!



'AND SO, WHILE EACH OF YOU MOVED UP THE EXECUTIVE LADDER, I SUNK LOWER AND LOWER...

YOU'RE PRESIDENT, NOW, LARRY! IF YOU SAID THE WORD, I COULD DO IT! PLEASE! I BEG OF YOU! GIVE ME A CHANCE AT SOMETHING ELSE...

I'D BE CRAZY, BELA. YOU'RE WORTH A FORTUNE AS YOU ARE! WHY KILL THE GOOSE THAT LAYS THE PROVERBIAL EGG?...



'OH, I DON'T DENY THAT I WAS FINANCIALLY REWARDED FOR THIS SELF-DEGRADATION. I HAD A NICE HOME IN BEVERLY HILLS, A SWIMMING POOL, A CHAUFFERED CAR... EVERYTHING A STAR SHOULD HAVE... EXCEPT SELF-PRIDE...

GOT THE NEW SCRIPT, BELA! YOU PLAY A GHOUL IN THIS!

NO! NO! I WON'T! NOT A GHOUL! THAT'S TOO MUCH!



"BUT I **PLAYED** THE PART. I WAS **TRAPPED** BY THEN. THERE WERE **BILLS** TO PAY, **NOTES** TO MEET. I WAS **AFRAID** TO GIVE UP THE LUXURIES I ENJOYED. I **PLAYED** "THE **HIDEOUS GHOUL**," AND AFTER THE PREVIEW..."

SAME OLD THING!

YEAH! DEFINITELY A "B" PICTURE!

MAGNUS BETTER START TRYING **OTHER THINGS!**



"IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF THE END. THE PREVIEWERS' SENTIMENTS WERE MULTIPLIED THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. THE PUBLIC WAS TIRED OF HORROR PICTURES." "THE HIDEOUS GHOUL" **LOST MONEY!** THE NEXT... "FRANKENSTEIN MEETS A WEREWOLF", IN WHICH I PLAYED **BOTH PARTS**... WAS A **MISERABLE FAILURE!**

SORRY, BELA. THE PARTY IS OVER! WE'RE **DROPPING** HORROR PICTURES. THEY'RE NO LONGER A **MONEY-MAKING PROPOSITION...**

THAT'S **FINE** WITH ME, SID. I'LL SEE WHAT **PLANS** L.B. HAS FOR ME **NOW!**



"I WENT TO SEE YOU, LARRY..."

SORRY, BELA. YOU'RE TYPED! WE **COULDN'T** USE YOU FOR ANYTHING **GENTEEL!** THE PUBLIC WILL **ALWAYS** ASSOCIATE YOU WITH **HORROR** AND **DEATH!**

YOU MEAN I'M **THROUGH, LARRY...** WASHED UP... **FINISHED!** THAT'S WHAT YOU MEAN!



"I WENT TO YOU, MILT..."

MILT! GIVE ME THE **CHANGE!** I CAN **ACT!** GIVE ME THE **CHANGE!**

I'D BE OUT OF MY **MIND, BELA!** IF... IF **HORROR COMES BACK**, I'LL GIVE YOU A **RING!**



"I EVEN APPEALED TO YOU, MARCEL..."

I'LL **CHANGE** MY **NAME.** YOU CAN GIVE ME A NEW **FACE... CHARACTER PARTS... ANYTHING!**

IT IS NOT UP TO ME, BELA! I AM **SORRY!**



"I WAS A HAS-BEEN... A **FADED STAR.** THE ERA WAS **OVER!**"

THIS MEANS YOU'LL HAVE TO SELL YOUR **BEVERLY HILLS** PLACE, BELA! YOU'RE **BROKE...**

TAKE **CARE** OF IT FOR ME, SID!



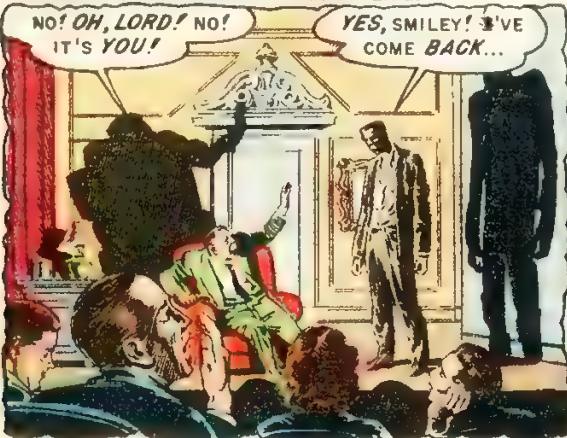
"I **SLIPPED DOWN... DOWN.** I LEFT **HOLLYWOOD** AND WENT TO **NEW YORK.** I TRIED **RADIO...**

GOOD-EVENING, **MYSTERY FANS.** THIS IS YOUR HOST IN **CHILLS, BELA KARDIFF,** WELCOMING YOU ONCE MORE TO THE **TERROR THEATER...**

IT WAS **GOOD** ONCE! BUT THIS STUFF IS **PASSÉ** NOW! CANCEL OUR **SPONSORSHIP** AT THE **END** OF THE **CONTRACT!**



'A SECOND-RATE PRODUCER OF BROADWAY PLAYS MANAGED TO GATHER ENOUGH FINANCIAL BACKING USING MY NAME TO STAR ME IN A HORROR PLAY...'



NO! OH, LORD! NO!
IT'S YOU!

YES, SMILEY! I'VE
COME BACK...

'THE CRITICS FANNED IT. THE PLAY CLOSED. THE BACKERS LOST A FORTUNE AND I NEVER GOT MY SALARY. THE PRODUCER SKIPPED. I WAS FORCED TO BORROW...'



JUST TILL I'M
WORKING AGAIN,
GEORGE! FOR OLD
TIMES' SAKE!

THIS IS MY LAST HANDOUT,
BELA! I'M SORRY! I GOT MY
OWN TROUBLES! BESIDES,
I'M GOING BACK TO MAGNUS
NEXT WEEK!

'I MANAGED TO SCRAPE ALONG BY ALLOWING A PUBLISHER OF SECOND-RATE BOOKS TO USE MY NAME ON A HORROR TALE ANTHOLOGY...'



'I SLEPT IN CHEAP HOTELS...'



WELL, IF IT ISN'T THE
SPOOK MAN HIMSELF!
WHO'D YOU MURDER
TODAY, "FRANKENSTEIN"?

PLEASE...
MY KEY...

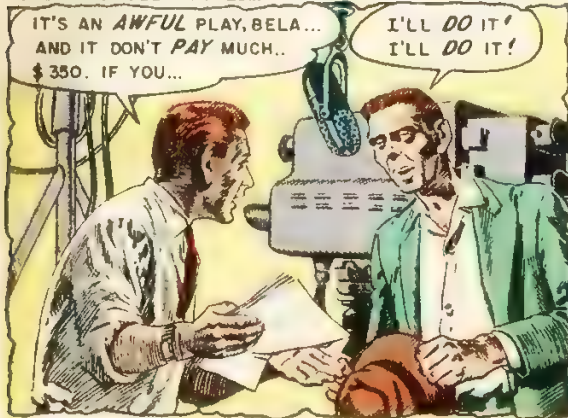
'I ATE IN CHEAP RESTAURANTS...'



WHAT'LL IT BE,
MIST—WELL, LOOK
WHO'S HAUNTING
MY JOINT! DRACULA!
IN PERSON!

COFFEE,
PLEASE...

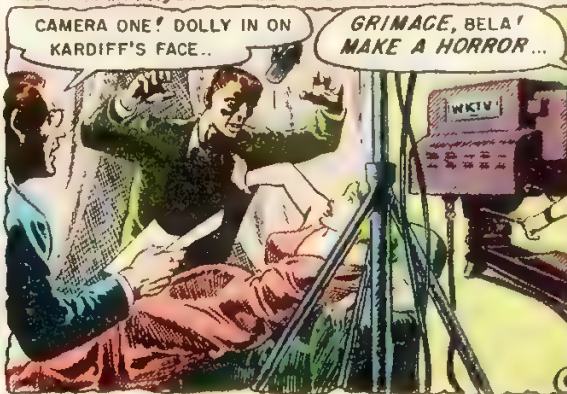
'IT WAS T.V. THAT SAVED ME FROM ENDING UP ON SKID ROW. T.V. IN ITS INFANCY... HUNGRY FOR NAMES... EVEN HAS-BEEN NAMES...'



IT'S AN AWFUL PLAY, BELA...
AND IT DON'T PAY MUCH...
\$ 350. IF YOU...

I'LL DO IT!
I'LL DO IT!

'OF COURSE, IT WAS A HORROR PLAY! WHAT ELSE COULD IT BE? BUT, IT FED ME FOR TWO MONTHS. AND THEN I GOT ANOTHER CALL... AND ANOTHER. I WASN'T GETTING RICH, BUT AT LEAST I WAS WORKING...'



CAMERA ONE! DOLLY IN ON
KARDIFF'S FACE..

GRIMACE, BELA!
MAKE A HORROR...

BELA KARDIFF FINISHED POURING THE LAST GLASS OF CHAMPAGNE...

THEY TELL ME IT WAS **YOUR IDEA, EDDIE...** THIS TESTIMONIAL DINNER. **EDDIE BACKMAN, MY OLD CAMERAMAN...**

WELL, BELA... I...



YOU CERTAINLY DID **YOUR JOB WELL, EDDIE...** BACK IN THOSE DAYS. **YOU PUT ME ON FILM IN ALL MY HORROR... ALL MY VILENESS AND EVIL...**

IT WAS **MY JOB, BELA...**



BELA TURNED AND STRODE BACK TO HIS SEAT. HE PICKED UP HIS GLASS...

OF COURSE, EDDIE. I UNDERSTAND! YOU HAD TO MAKE ME HORRIBLE. YOU, TOO, MARCEL... AND YOU, GEORGE... MILT... SID... DON... LARRY. YOU ALL HAD TO...



BELA LIFTED HIS GLASS HIGH...

YOU **ALL** DID WHAT YOU **HAD** TO DO! AND SO, **I OFFER THIS TOAST...** TO THE **THINGS** YOU **ALL** DID FOR ME!



THE MEN AROUND THE TABLE STOOD AND DRAINED THEIR GLASSES...



AND BELA KARDIFF SMILED...

YOU **KNOW**, GENTLEMEN... WHEREVER I **WENT** AFTER MY STAR **FADED** HERE IN **HOLLYWOOD**, I COULD **NEVER ESCAPE** THOSE **THINGS** YOU DID FOR ME. I COULD **NEVER LIVE DOWN** THE **STEREOTYPE** YOU'D CAST OF ME... THE **HORROR CHARACTER... THE MURDERER.** SO I **FINALLY ACCEPTED IT!**



... AND PUT DOWN HIS UNTOUCHED GLASS OF CHAMPAGNE...

I **AM** WHAT YOU **MADE** ME, GENTLEMEN! I PUT **STRYCHNINE** IN YOUR CHAMPAGNE!

GOOD LORD! CHOKE!



THE END

TIMETABLE

Mr. Gardent slammed the front door furiously, his face livid with rage. Snorting savagely, he hurried toward the subway. This fight he just had with Sylvia was the last he was going to stomach; it was time to scare the life out of that ungrateful wife of his!

All day long at the office, while he toyed aimlessly with his paperweight and mechanical pencil, Mr. Gardent's mind was a turmoil of plans to exact vengeance for the heartache he had been subjected to. At four o'clock he banged his fist against his desk top and brayed with delight. To his puzzled secretary he blurted that he was going home an hour early... all the way to his house he fondled the idea he had concocted. Polished it, in fact, until it gleamed like a jewel of a plan. He'd shock his wife out of ten years' growth!

It was Sylvia's bridge day, he thought as he quietly opened the front door, and strode toward the bathroom. She wouldn't be home 'til a few minutes after five... give him plenty of time to gulp down the huge overdose of sleeping pills. He had carefully checked on the strength of those pills at the time his prescription was filled: if he was rushed to the hospital within *two hours* of the time he swallowed the lethal overdose, he'd be right as rain within twenty-four hours!

Mr. Gardent settled comfortably into his leather den chair, puffed his pipe until the last ember had turned to cinder. He twirled the bottle cap, tilted the glass jar until a mound of greenish pills spilled into his palm. He checked his watch once more. It was ten minutes before five. Sylvia would be home within a half-hour. She'd find him sprawled here in the den, the fake suicide note he'd prepared pinned to his shirt. He knew Sylvia

as well as he knew his own reflection in the shaving mirror... she'd probably been devastated by that argument they'd had this morning. She'd be home on time, tearfully begging him to forgive the hasty words she'd uttered. She'd play the part he'd outlined for her... wail into the phone, hold his hand tightly on the ambulance trip across town, act like an angel for at least a month!

Mr. Gardent smirked, opened his mouth and let the pile of green pills slide down his throat. The druggist had told him five pills would disturb his nervous system, ten would probably prove fatal unless steps were taken within two hours. He giggled as the twentieth capsule went down his gullet. Then, beginning to feel delightfully drowsy, he settled deep into the chair. He closed his eyes, beginning to dream of the gentleness with which he would accept Sylvia's tremulous pleas for forgiveness. He'd be gracious, he reassured himself, as his chin settled on his chest and the pills took effect.

* * * * *

Once, at five minutes before seven o'clock, Mr. Gardent's body trembled and a half-choked moan escaped from lips already starting to turn purple. By seven o'clock his tortured writhing had stopped completely. And fifteen feet from his body, behind the closed door of the bedroom, Sylvia Gardent's body had turned cold. Pinned to her dress was a carefully prepared note. "Didn't go to the bridge game today," it said. "Instead, I took twenty of your sleeping pills. I swallowed them at exactly four o'clock. In two hours... by *six o'clock*, unless I am rushed to a hospital... I will be dead!"

E.C. WENT TO SEA IN SEARCH OF ANOTHER NEW TREND...



AND WE CAME UP WITH...
SAGAS OF THE SEA, SHIPS, PLUNDER AND...

PIRACY



**NOW YOU SEARCH
FOR IT!**

BUT IF YOU *CAN'T FIND PIRACY*
AT YOUR LOCAL NEWSSTAND, YOU
CAN **SUBSCRIBE!** JUST FILL OUT
THE COUPON AND MAIL, TOGETHER
WITH **ONE HUNDRED PIECES OF
CENT** (THAT'S ONE BUCK, LAND-
LUBBERS!), TO:

THE SEASICK EDITORS OF
PIRACY
ROOM 106
225 LAFAYETTE STREET
N.Y.C. 12, N.Y.

OKAY, BILGE RATS! YOU SHANGHAIED ME!
I ENCLOSE \$1.00 FOR THE NEXT EIGHT ISSUES
OF **PIRACY!**

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZONE
NO. _____

SHOCK TALK

Dear Editors,

Congratulations! I have just finished two of the greatest stories I have ever read. "Raw Deal" kept me guessing up to the last panel. It was marvelous. As for the second story, "The Confidant," it left me staring at the wall. It takes real guts to print such a story. And after reading it, you begin to realize some of the horrors that can take place in America when stupid, ignorant mobs start taking the law into their own hands, and go on a rampage. Feldstein and Wood deserve a medal for their excellent work in the fields of racial tolerance and human understanding. You guys are doing a great job. Again I say congratulations.

Jim Seff
Baltimore, Md.

... There is no other one-two punch in the comic book industry like Feldstein and Wood and their "off-the-beaten-path" stories. Feldstein's writing and Wood's drawing seem to go together naturally. Being a good Catholic, I would like to say that "The Confidant" is the greatest story I have ever read.

David McGill
Slidell, La.

... In SS No. 15, I thought "The Confidant" was one of the best I've ever read. A real masterpiece. In fact, the whole magazine was exceptionally good, but "The Confidant" was really great. As long as you present stories of this nature, I'll be an ardent Shock SuspenStories fan.

Dale Chilson
Velva, N. C.

... I have just finished your story, "The Confidant," and it's one of the most interesting stories I've ever read. It gives a true picture of the seal of Confession of the Roman Catholic Religion, and how a priest suffered even death, rather than break the sacred seal. These stories about religious and racial persecution are the best you guys have done yet. Keep up the good work.

(Name withheld by request)
Peru, Ill.

... In case some of you who read E.C.'s story, "The Confidant," do not understand the ending, let me explain it to you. A Catholic priest is bound by a "Sacramental Secret" not to reveal anything that has been confessed to him.

(Signed) A Catholic
Trenton, N.J.

... This is the first time in my life that I have ever written to any editor about any kind of magazine, but I must compliment you on Shock SuspenStories. I only wish there were more books like this one. It is the best, the very best.

E. A. Anderson CS3
Naval Station
Newport, Rhode Island

... Thanks for another great shocker, "The Confidant." Thank God we are outgrowing mob violence—not one lynching in 1953. I feel that men like you are mainly responsible for this great record.

Nelson Bridwell
Oklahoma City, Okla.

... I have read all your stories against segregation and racial prejudice, but you have really proven your ability in "The Confidant." It was the most heart-warming story I have ever read. Keep up the good work and give us more stories of this sort.

J. S.
Cumberland, Maryland

... I am fifteen years of age and was confined to bed several months ago with Rheumatic Fever. I just read your No. 15 issue of Shock. Believe me, it was really a thriller, especially the story "For Crying Out Loud." Why, when I finished, I almost fell out of bed.

C. J. R.
Lebanon, Ohio

... Do you call No. 15 issue a mag? First you present "Raw Deal" which made my feet come through my mouth, stomach first. Then, "The Confidant" which made me cry my head off. What are you guys trying to do, kill me?

Eldridge Page
Lynchburg, Va.

... Nothing has ever made me as mad as those creeps who keep writing criticisms against the excellent stories you print against segregation. Such people do not deserve America and America certainly doesn't need them. Your stories are the best and I want to compliment you on them. You should put one of them in every E.C. Mag.

James Curtis Jackson
Robstown, Texas

... You, the Editors of Shock SuspenStories, have initiated a wonderful thing, a slap at prejudice. Keep up the good work. Publish at least one "tolerance" story in each issue. You will not lose customers, you will gain friends.

Dorothy G. Mentzer
Lancaster, Pa.

Well... no new friends this issue! We racked our brains, but couldn't come up with anything that we felt was worthy of following "Blood Brothers," "The Whipping," "The Confidant," et al! —ed.

Commercial: A subscription to Shock SuspenStories, or to any other E.C. mag, costs one buck (\$1.00) for eight issues. Address for mail or sub orders is:

Shock Editors
Room 706, Dept. 17
225 Lafayette St.
N. Y. C. 12, N. Y.

THE ASSASSIN

DRIZZLE...THE KIND OF COLD MISTY DRIZZLE YOUR FLESH SOPS UP LIKE A SPONGE...THE KIND OF DRIZZLE THAT WRAPS ITSELF AROUND YOU LIKE AN ICY-WET SHROUD. I STAND IN THE SHADOWS IN THE DRIZZLE THINKIN' ABOUT THAT REDHEADED GAL BACK IN CHI, AND HOW I OUGHT TO BE WITH HER INSTEAD OF SHIVERIN' IN THE RAIN OF A NEW YORK NIGHT. BUT THROUGH MY SKIN-THIN LEATHER GLOVE, I FEEL THE BLUE-BLACK COLD OF THE COLT .38 IN MY TRENCHCOAT POCKET, AND THEN I THINK OF HOW A FIVE-C-NOTE FOR A COUPLE OF HOURS WORK IS WORTH FLYING EAST FOR AND LEAVIN' A REDHEAD FOR A LITTLE WHILE, ONLY WHY DID IT HAVE TO BE ON A LOUSY NIGHT LIKE THIS ONE. SO I WAIT. AND FINALLY, MY MARK COMES OUT OF HIS LUSH, DRY APARTMENT BUILDING. I SQUEEZE BACK INTO THE SHADOWS AND GRIP THE LOADED HEATER IN MY POCKET A LITTLE TIGHTER...

THE DOORMAN STEPS OUT INTO THE SHINY-BLACK GUTTER AND BLOWS HIS WHISTLE. I WORRY, 'CAUSE IF MY MARK GETS A CAB, I'LL PROBABLY LOSE HIM...



BUT THEN THE DOORMAN STEPS BACK UNDER THE CANOPY AFTER SEVERAL TRIES WITH HIS LITTLE TIN TWEETER, AND I BREATHE EASIER. HE SHRUGS AND MY MARK STARTS HOOFIN' IT. I TAKE A LAST DEEP DRAG, THEN FLICK MY BUTT LOOPIN' INTO THE GUTTER. IT STICKS THERE IN THE WET, HISSES, AND THE RED GLOW ON THE TIP GOES OUT FAST. I STEP FROM THE SHADOWS...



I START WALKIN' BEHIND HIM, MY STEPS IN RHYTHM WITH HIS. I CURSE THE WETNESS THAT MAKES A SQUISH-IN NOISE UNDER MY RUBBER SOLES. BUT THE WET IS GOOD TOO. THE WET MAKES IT A PERFECT NIGHT FOR HUNTIN'... *MAN-HUNTIN'...*



EMPTY STREETS... DARK, DESERTED STREETS. NOW HE'S JUST A BLACK HULK MOVIN' AHEAD OF ME, THEN HE'S BATHED IN THE SOFT YELLOW LAMPPOST LIGHT, THE MIST-DROPS ON HIS HAT AND COAT GLITTERIN'...



QUIET, EMPTY, GLITTERIN' WET STREETS. THAT'S THE THING ABOUT MY JOB. IT'S GOT TO BE QUIET..



IT'S GOT TO BE SOMEPLACE WHERE NOBODY'LL SEE... WHERE I CAN TRIGGER MY MARK AND RUN... WHERE THERE'LL BE NO WITNESSES. LIKE AN ALLEY... LIKE A STREET OF CLOSED STORES OR WAREHOUSES.



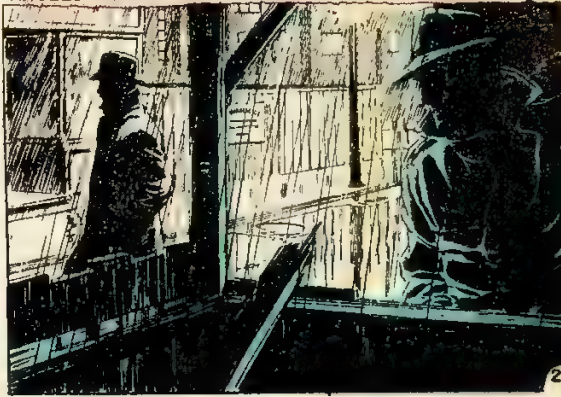
NOW HE STOPS. HE LOOKS INTO A STORE WINDOW. MAYBE HE'S GOT A QUEER FEELIN' ALONG HIS SPINE BUT DON'T KNOW WHY. HE DON'T KNOW HE'S A MARK. NOT YET. I STOP. I LIGHT A BUTT, CUPPIN' MY MITTS TO HIDE THE GLOW. I WAIT...



HE KEEPS STARIN' INTO THE WINDOW, I GOTTA MOVE ON BEFORE HE GETS TO WONDERIN'. I PASS HIM AND GET THE URGE TO GUN HIM RIGHT THERE AND RUN... TAKE MY CHANCES... BUT I DON'T. THEY COULD'VE GOT ANY PUNK TO DO A JOB LIKE *THAT!* BUT THEY WANTED A PRO... AND I COST 'EM A COOL FIVE C'S, PLUS EXPENSES, TO BRING IN FROM CHI. I'M GONNA GIVE 'EM A CLEAN, PRO JOB... WITH NO WITNESSES...



UP THE STREET, I DUCK INTO AN ALLEY. I WAIT IN THE DARKNESS TILL I HEAR HIS FOOTSTEPS. I SUCK IN MY BREATH AND HOLD IT TILL MY BELLY ACHES. HE ANGLES ACROSS THE STREET BEFORE HE REACHES ME...



FOR NEARLY AN HOUR I PAD ALONG AFTER HIM, STALK-
IN' THROUGH THE NAGGIN', NUMBIN' DRIZZLE. WHEN HE
STOPS... I STOP. WHEN HE TURNS A CORNER... I TURN.
PATIENCE. THAT'S THE WORD TO DESCRIBE MY JOB:
PATIENCE. FIVE HUNDRED BUCKS WORTH OF PATIENCE.
THEN IT HAPPENS. HE MUST'VE FELT MY EYES ON HIS
BACK, 'CAUSE HE TURNS HIS HEAD AN' TAKES A QUICK
GANDER AT ME...



I TURN A CORNER AFTER HIM AND
THE FIRST THING I SEE IS THIS
SHINY BLACK RAINCOAT WITH A
BADGE. I QUICK CUT DOWN TO A
SLOW WALK. I SEE MY MARK LOOK-
IN' AT THE COP LIKE HE WANTS TO
TELL HIM ABOUT ME. BUT HE DON'T.
'CAUSE HE STILL AIN'T SURE...



I GO IN FURTHER. I LISTEN FOR
HIS BREATHIN'. A CAR PASSES THE
OTHER END OF THE ALLEY, ITS HEAD-
LIGHTS FLOODIN' IT WITH LIGHT. I
DON'T SEE MY MARK...



HE SCOOTS AROUND THE NEXT
CORNER A GOOD HUNDRED FEET
AHEAD OF ME. JUST AS I MAKE
THE TURN, I SEE HIM DUCK INTO
AN ALLEY...



IT'S TAKIN' A CHANCE, BUT I
PULL A LITTLE FLASHLIGHT FROM
MY POCKET AND NEEDLE THE BEAM
AROUND. MY .38 IS ALREADY OUT,
AND I GOT THE SAFETY OFF...



NOW, SLOW... VERY SLOW... HE BEGINS 'TAKIN' LONGER,
QUICKER STEPS. I STICK BEHIND LIKE THERE'S AN
INVISIBLE ROPE BETWEEN US. HE AIN'T SURE YET, HE
DON'T LOOK AROUND, BUT HE MUST FEEL ME BEHIND HIM...



I GO IN SLOW, EVERY MUSCLE IN MY
BODY KNOTTED TIGHT. NOW! NOW!
IF I CAN NAIL HIM! THIS IS THE
KIND OF PLACE... A DARK ALLEY
BETWEEN TWO LOFT BUILDIN'. NO
HOUSES. NO STORES. NO PEOPLE.
ONLY WHERE IS HE?...



ALL OF A SUDDEN, I HEAR HIM
BREAK FROM SOMEWHERE BEHIND
ME, WHININ' LIKE A SCARED CAT AS
HE RUNS. THE SUCKER'S FRAMED IN
THE ALLEY ENTRANCE LIKE A SITTIM'
DUCK. I TAKE CAREFUL AIM...



BUT I DON'T SHOOT, 'CAUSE I HEAR THIS TALKIN' AND LAUGHIN' AND TWO SAILORS OUT ON THE TOWN PASS THE ALLEY AND EYE MY MARK AS HE COMES SCAMPERIN' OUT...



I CURSE 'EM UNDER MY BREATH AND HIGH-TAIL IT OUT AFTER MY MARK. HE'S WALKIN' NEAR 'EM, LOOKIN' BACK AT ME. NOW HE KNOWS HE KNOWS FOR SURE HE'S A MARK AND I'M AFTER HIM...



I STICK CLOSE BEHIND. I FEEL LIKE A JERK WALKIN' IN A SLOPPY DRIZZLE...COLD AND MISERABLE...JUST TO GUN A GUY I DON'T EVEN KNOW. I MAKE MYSELF THINK OF THE FIVE C'S WAITIN' IF I DELIVER. I ALSO THINK OF THE REDHEAD BACK IN CHI. SO I STICK, AND SOON THE TWO TARS HEAD INTO A BAR...



NOW MY MARK IS ALONE AND HE'S PLENTY SCARED. HE DODGES AROUND THIS CORNER AND THAT...



HE CROSSES STREETS. HE BACKTRACKS. MY MARK KNOWS I'M FOLLOWIN' HIM AND HE'S SQUIRMIN' AND RUNNIN' LIKE A RABBIT RUNNIN' FROM A HOUND...



AND LIKE A RABBIT, HE FINDS A HOLE IN THE GROUND AND DIVES INTO IT. A SUBWAY KIOSK...



I HIT THE TURNSTILES JUST AS A TRAIN PULLS IN. I FISH FOR A DIME BUT IT DON'T FIT AND I SWEAR OUT LOUD. YOU GOTTA HAVE A TOKEN...



THERE'S NO TIME, SO I VAULT THE TURNSTILE AND JUST MAKE IT INTO THE CAR AS THE DOORS SLAM SHUT...



I STAY ON THE PLATFORM AT THE END OF THE CAR WHERE I CAN LOOK PAST THE SEA OF SLEEPY, EMPTY, STARING, SUBWAY FACES TO WHERE MY MARK SITS BREATHIN' HARD AND WIPIN' THE SWEAT FROM HIS BROW...



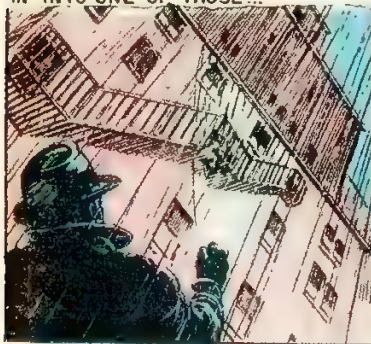
WHEN WE PULL INTO THE NEXT STATION, MY MARK GETS OFF. HE'S FIGURED HE'S LOST ME AND HE'S BREATHIN' EASIER. BUT AS HE CLIMBS THE EXIT STAIRS HE LOOKS AROUND AND HIS FACE GOES ASH WHITE...



MY MARK'S WALKED INTO IT THIS TIME...THE KIND OF NEIGHBORHOOD I NEED FOR THE JOB. NO WITNESSES...NOTHIN' BUT HIM AND ME AND BLACK,EMPTY,RAIN-SOAKED STREETS.



THEN I SEE THE RUSTED LADDER HANGIN' FROM THE FIRE-ESCAPE LEADIN' UP THE OLD ABANDONED BUILDIN'. SOME WINDOWS GOT BOARDS OVER 'EM AND SOME'S JUST GAPIN' HOLES. AND MY MARK'S DISSAPPEAR-IN' INTO ONE OF THOSE...



I HEAR HIS FEET POUNDIN' UP THE STAIRS AND LOOSE PLASTER DUST IS FLOATIN' AROUND SO I CAN TASTE IT,AND IT GRINDS GRITTY BETWEEN MY TEETH. I SCRAMBLE BACK DOWN THE CORRIDOR AND TAKE THE SHAKY SAGGIN' STAIRS TWO-AT-A-TIME...



HE TRIES AN ALLEY AGAIN, FIGURIN' IF HE GAVE ME THE SLIP THAT WAY ONCE, IT'LL WORK AGAIN...



I CLIMB,THINKIN' HOW THIS IS LIKE A CAT-AND-MOUSE GAME WITH A FIVE-C-NOTE PRIZE AT THE END OF IT. I GET INTO THE BLACK,ROT-STINKIN' LOFT AND POKE IN EVERY CORNER WITH MY LIGHT.



BEFORE I CAN GLIM THE SUCKER, I FEEL A COLD DRAUGHT AND I KNOW HE'S MADE THE ROOF. WHEN I GET THERE, HE'S STANDIN' ON THE PARAPET, READY TO JUMP.



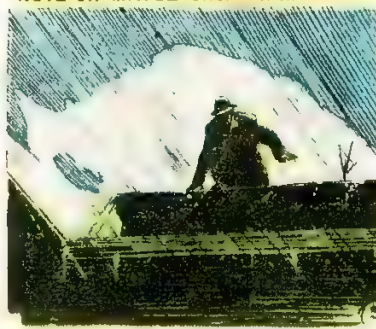
I GO IN WITH MY POCKET FLASH LIT AND I GOTTA SMILE.THERE'S WALLS ON THREE SIDES. IT'S A BLIND ALLEY. BUT HE'S NOWHERE IN SIGHT...



I GO OUT INTO A LITTER-CLUTTERED CORRIDOR AND MOVE DOWN IT. SOMEWHERE BEHIND ME I HEAR HIM STUMBLE AND GROAN...



THEN HE'S GONE,THE CRAZY IDIOT. I RUN TO THE SPOT AND SEE HE'S LEAPED TO AN ADJOINING BUILDIN' ACROSS AN AIR-SHAFT. IT'S A BIG JUMP. FOR HIM,THERE WAS NOTHIN' TO LOSE. FOR ME,IT'S A TOSSUP BETWEEN LOSIN' A BIG FAT FIVE-C-NOTE OR MAYBE CROAKIN'...



I SHUT MY EYES AND TAKE THE LEAP...



I FOLLOW HIM INTO THE ROOF ENTRANCE OF THE NEXT BUILDING, AND I CAN HEAR HIM GOIN' DOWN THE STAIRS. I FLICK ON MY FLASH AND CATCH HIM IN A CIRCLE OF LIGHT WHERE THE STAIRS END IN A NARROW CORRIDOR...



I KNOW I GOT HIM NOW. I'VE SEEN THAT LOOK OF TERRORIZED SURRENDER BEFORE. HE BACKS UP...FINDS HIS LAST FAINT HOPE...A DOOR...AND STUMBLES THROUGH...



MY MARK STUMBLES INTO A ROOM WHERE IT'S PITCH BLACK. I HEAR HIM SLUMP INTO A CORNER, BREATHIN' LOUD, WHEEZIN' THROUGH HIS FLEM-CHOKED THROAT. I PICK HIM UP WITH MY LIGHT. I GOT HIM WHERE I WANT HIM NOW...WITH NO WITNESSES...ALONE...



HIS FACE IS A SICK-GREEN AND HE'S BUG-EYED, BUT THERE'S NO PLEADIN' ON HIS FACE 'CAUSE HE KNOWS I GOT A JOB TO DO. ALREADY I'M FEELIN' THAT FIVE-C-NOTE IN MY POCKET AS I SQUEEZE THE TRIGGER...



THE BLAST ECHOES AWAY LIKE THE FLAT WE'RE IN IS BIG AS A BARN. HE FALLS OVER...THE TOP OF HIS HEAD GONE IN A BLOODY SMEAR. AND THEN THE SCREAMIN' STARTS...SHRIEKIN' AND HOLLERIN'...AND LIGHTS START FLASHIN' ON...BRIGHT LIGHTS...



IN A COUPLE OF SECONDS THE PLACE IS CRAWLIN'... WOMEN SQUEELIN' AND MEN POURIN' DOWN THE AISLES TOWARD ME. YEAH, THAT'S WHAT I SAID! "AISLES", ME! THE OLD PRO! I GUN MY MARK IN A THEATRE... BEFORE FIVE HUNDRED PAIRS OF EYES...



IT TURNS OUT I'VE WALKED IN ON THE OPENING SCENE OF A PLAY ABOUT PRESIDENT MCKINLEY AND THE GUY WHAT SHOT HIM. IT'S CALLED "THE ASSASSIN". THERE'S A TWIST, HUH? WHOSE PICTURE DO YOU SUPPOSE IS ON A FIVE-C-BILL? YEAH...

The OPERATION

THE REASON WHY I CAN TELL THIS STORY NOW IS BECAUSE I AM NO LONGER IN THE "FENCE" BUSINESS, WHICH IS THE UNDERWORLD TERM FOR A MERCHANT OF STOLEN GOODS, HAVING PULLED A FEW STRINGS WITH POLITICO FRIENDS OF MINE WITH WHOM I USED TO DEAL BEFORE THEY ACCUMULATED THEIR FORTUNES AND BECAME HONEST UPSTANDING PILLARS OF SOCIETY AND DEVOTED SERVANTS OF THE PEOPLE. OFTEN, NOW, WHILE I AM RINGING UP WIN-TICKETS FOR THE PONY PLAYERS WHO COME TO MY TWO DOLLAR WINDOW, I THINK OF ALLIE AND BIMMY AND DOC SLATER AND THE SWEET LITTLE PROFITABLE RACKET THEY ENJOYED UNTIL GREED STEPPED IN AND BROUGHT THEM TO THE PARTING OF THE WAYS. IT HAPPENED LIKE THIS...

ALLIE AND BIMMY AND DOC SLATER WERE IN THE SMUGGLING BUSINESS, WHICH CAN BE VERY LUCRATIVE IF YOU PLAY YOUR CARDS RIGHT. IN EUROPE, ALLIE AND BIMMY COLLECTED DIAMONDS...



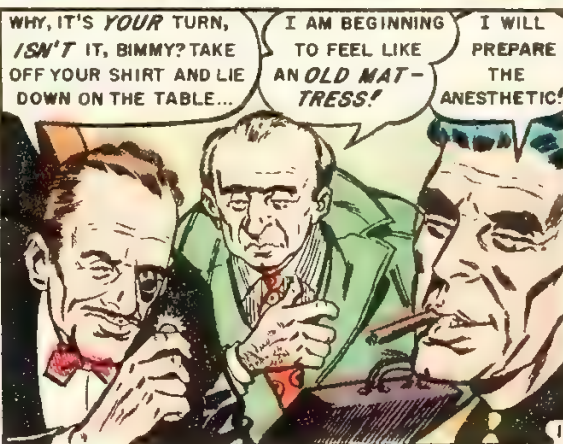
THIS COLLECTION WOULD BE CARRIED ON SWIFTLY AND CONVINCINGLY ...AS ALLIE AND BIMMY WERE SWIFT AND CONVINCING GENTLEMEN...



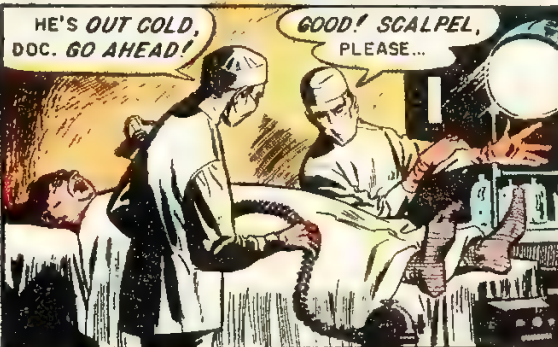
HAVING LIFTED A GOODLY HAUL OF THE SPARKLING BAUBLES, ALLIE AND BIMMY WOULD RETURN POST HASTE TO THEIR HIDEOUT, WHERE DOC SLATER WAITED WITH BAITED BREATH AND STEAMING STERILIZER...



DOC SLATER WOULD FINGER AND FONDLE THE GLITTERING CARBON PELLETS, FOR IF THERE WAS ONE THING DOC SLATER LOVED BETTER THAN HIS SHINY SCALPELS, IT WAS GLITTERING DIAMONDS. PERHAPS THAT EXPLAINS WHY HE'D DECIDED TO USE HIS SURGICAL SKILL FOR SMUGGLING PURPOSES RATHER THAN FOR IMPROVING HEALTH...



THUSLY WOULD FOLLOW THE EXTREMELY CLEVER METHOD WHEREBY, UNDETECTED, BIMMY AND ALLIE AND THE DOC WERE ABLE TO SMUGGLE OVER SIXTY THOUSAND DOLLARS WORTH OF DIAMONDS PAST THE EAGLE-EYED ALERT CUSTOMS INSPECTORS AND INTO OUR GRAND AND GLORIOUS COUNTRY OVER A PERIOD OF THREE YEARS...



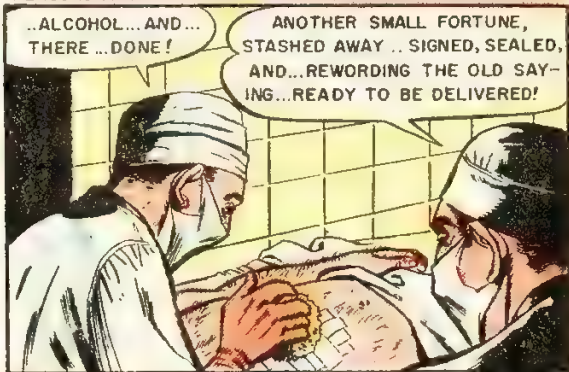
AFTER THIS AFOREMENTIONED INCISION HAD HEALED SUFFICIENTLY, SAID PARTNER WOULD PURCHASE A STEAMSHIP TICKET AND BOARD A LINER BOUND FOR THE GOOD OLD U.S.A...



AND HURRY, WITHOUT DELAY, TO THE DOCTOR'S NEW YORK APARTMENT AND HIS ANXIOUSLY WAITING COHORTS. THERE, ANOTHER OPERATION WOULD BE PERFORMED AND THE CONTRABAND CARGO WOULD BE REMOVED...



YES, THAT IS ABSOLUTELY CORRECT. NIMBLE-FINGERED DOC SLATER WOULD CUT OPEN ONE OF HIS TWO BOYS AND NEATLY PACK THE VALUABLE DIAMONDS IN AMONG A GOODLY PORTION OF FATTY TISSUE SOMEWHERE ON SAID PARTNER'S PERSON, THEN HE WOULD CAREFULLY CLOSE THE INCISION...



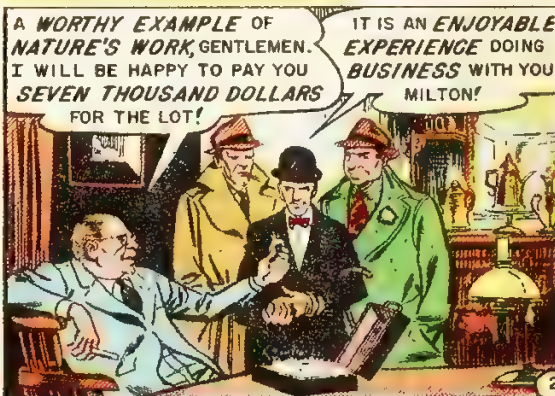
THE REMAINING PARTNER AND THE DOCTOR WOULD THEN ARRANGE RESERVATIONS ON AN OVERSEAS AIR-PLANE WHOSE LANDING-TIME IN NEW YORK COINCIDED WITH THE LINER'S ARRIVAL...



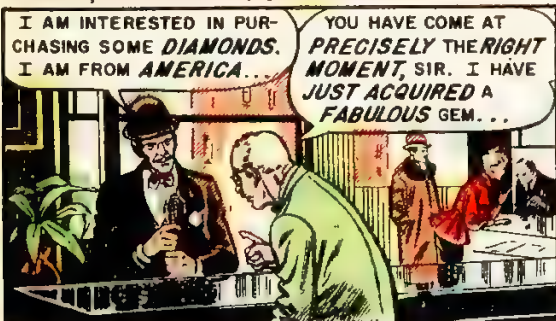
SAID PARTNER, CARRYING THE DIAMOND HAUL BENEATH THE SURFACE OF HIS THICK SKIN, WOULD PASS UNDETECTED THROUGH CUSTOMS...



AND SHORTLY THEREAFTER, MY OLD MODEST BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENT WOULD BE GRACED WITH ALLIE AND BIMMY AND DOC'S CHARMING PRESENCES AS I EXAMINED AND VALUED SAID CONTRABAND CARGO...



AS I MENTIONED PREVIOUSLY, ALLIE AND BIMMY AND DOC WERE ENGAGED IN A HIGHLY PROFITABLE OPERATION, AND I AM NOT ATTEMPTING TO MAKE A POOR PUN ON THE IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THEIR RACKET. BUT, AS I ALSO MENTIONED, GREED STEPPED IN. I BELIEVE THE THREE GENTLEMEN WERE IN ANTWERP, EUROPE'S DIAMOND CAPITOL, AT THE TIME...



I AM INTERESTED IN PURCHASING SOME DIAMONDS. I AM FROM AMERICA...

YOU HAVE COME AT PRECISELY THE RIGHT MOMENT, SIR. I HAVE JUST ACQUIRED A FABULOUS GEM...

THIS BEAUTIFUL TREASURE RECENTLY ARRIVED FROM RHODESIA. IT IS, AS YET, UNCUT AND UNPOLISHED. AT PRESENT IT WEIGHS NINETY-TWO CARATS... AND IS WORTH AT LEAST TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLARS IN U.S. CURRENCY...

IT... IT'S BEAUTIFUL! BUT I... I AM INTERESTED IN MUCH SMALLER STONES, I'M AFRAID!



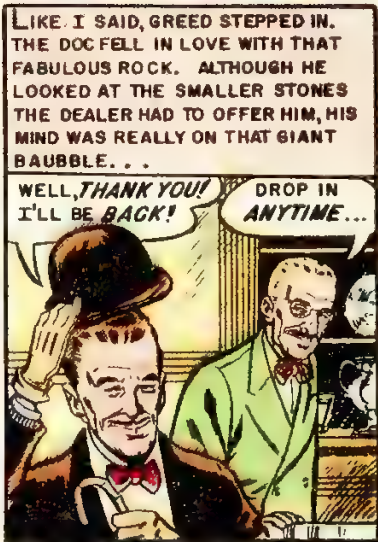
IT WOULD BE SUCH A SHAME TO CUT THIS UP INTO SEVERAL SMALL STONES...

OH, YES... A SHAME...



OH, WELL, THERE WILL BE OTHER CUSTOMERS, I AM SURE! NOW, LET ME SEE WHAT I HAVE FOR YOU...

BEAUTIFUL! SIMPLY BEAUTIFUL!

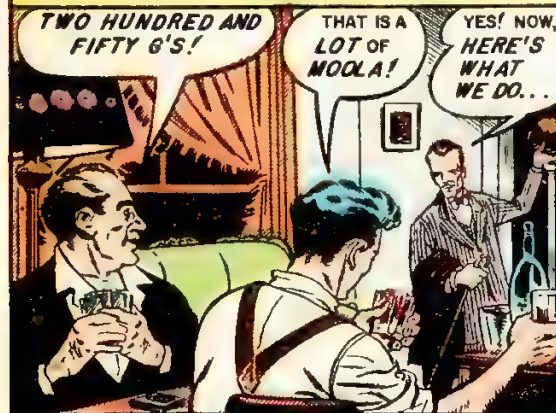


LIKE I SAID, GREED STEPPED IN. THE DOC FELL IN LOVE WITH THAT FABULOUS ROCK. ALTHOUGH HE LOOKED AT THE SMALLER STONES THE DEALER HAD TO OFFER HIM, HIS MIND WAS REALLY ON THAT GIANT BAUBLE...

WELL, THANK YOU! I'LL BE BACK!

DROP IN ANYTIME...

AND SO, DOCTOR SLATER MADE HIS PLANS. HE HAD TO HAVE THAT NINETY-TWO CARAT DIAMOND NO MATTER WHAT. HE JUST HAD TO...



TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY G'S!

THAT IS A LOT OF MOOLA!

YES! NOW, HERE'S WHAT WE DO...

AND SO, ONCE MORE, SWIFTLY AND CONVINCINGLY, ALLIE AND BIMMY MADE A COLLECTION...



.. AND THE FABULOUS GEM WAS THEIRS...



BEAUTIFUL!
SIMPLY
BEAUTIFUL!

I WANT TO
CARRY THIS
ONE, DOC!

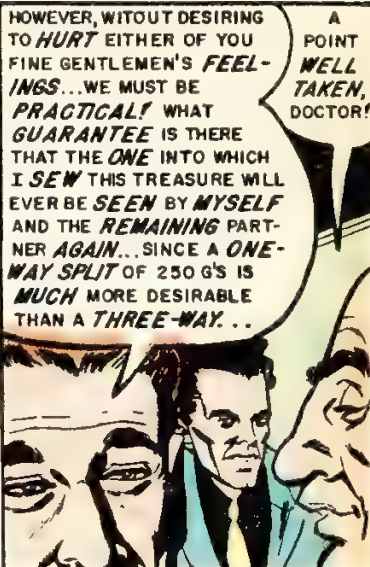
HEY...

YES, GREED HAD STEPPED IN... GREED
AND ITS COMPANION... MISTRUST...



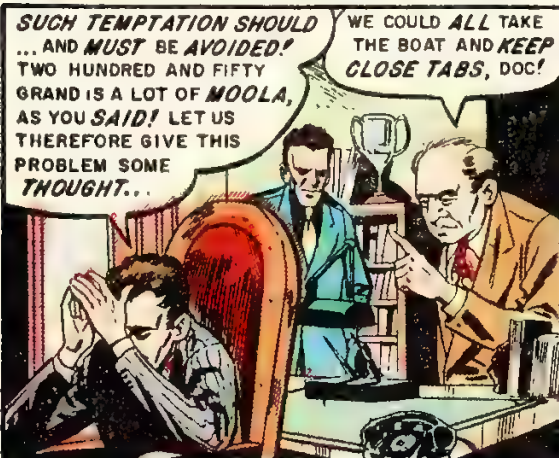
GENTLEMEN, THIS CALLS
FOR SOME *THOUGHT!*
A ROCK OF THIS CALIBRE
AND WORTH CAN SPELL
RETIREMENT FOR
ALL OF US...

THAT IS
A DELIGHT-
FUL
THOUGHT!



HOWEVER, WITHOUT DESIRING TO
HURT EITHER OF YOU
FINE GENTLEMEN'S *FEEL-
INGS*... WE MUST BE
PRACTICAL! WHAT
GUARANTEE IS THERE
THAT THE *ONE* INTO WHICH
I *SEW* THIS TREASURE WILL
EVER BE *SEEN* BY *MYSELF*
AND THE *REMAINING* PART-
NER *AGAIN*... SINCE A *ONE-
WAY SPLIT* OF 250 G'S IS
MUCH MORE DESIRABLE
THAN A *THREE-WAY*...

A
POINT
WELL
TAKEN,
DOCTOR!



SUCH TEMPTATION SHOULD
... AND *MUST* BE *AVOIDED!*
TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY
GRAND IS A LOT OF *MOOLA*,
AS YOU *SAID!* LET US
THEREFORE GIVE THIS
PROBLEM SOME
THOUGHT...

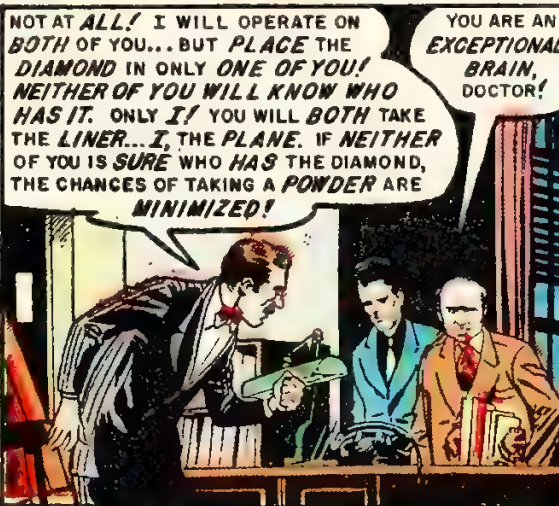
WE COULD *ALL* TAKE
THE *BOAT* AND *KEEP*
CLOSE TABS, DOC!



NO! TOO *SUSPICIOUS!*
THERE IS ONLY *ONE* *ANSWER!*
I WILL OPERATE ON *BOTH*
OF YOU...

BOTH
OF US?!

YOU GOING
TO *CUT*
THE *ROCK*
IN *HALF*?



NOT AT *ALL!* I WILL OPERATE ON
BOTH OF YOU... BUT *PLACE* THE
DIAMOND IN ONLY *ONE* OF YOU!
NEITHER OF YOU WILL KNOW WHO
HAS IT. ONLY *I!* YOU WILL *BOTH* TAKE
THE *LINER*... *I*, THE *PLANE*. IF *NEITHER*
OF YOU IS *SURE* WHO HAS THE *DIAMOND*,
THE CHANCES OF TAKING A *POWDER* ARE
MINIMIZED!

YOU ARE AN
EXCEPTIONAL
BRAIN,
DOCTOR!



COME, THEN. *BOTH* OF
YOU... *ON THE TABLE*.
THERE IS MUCH *WORK*
TO DO...

WELL, BIMMY!
I AM *HOPING*
THIS WILL BE
THE *LAST SCAR*
I WILL *OBTAIN!*

I *LIKE-
WISE*,
ALLIE!

AND SO, FOR THE LAST TIME, DOC SLATER OPERATED. ONLY THIS TIME, IT WAS A MULTIPLE OPERATION...



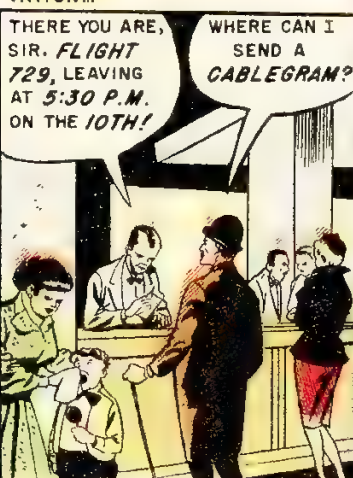
WHEN BIMMY AND ALLIE CAME TO, THEY **BOTH** HAD NEAT LITTLE FRESHLY SEWN INCISIONS ON THEIR PERSONS AND **NEITHER** KNEW WHICH CONTAINED THE FABULOUS NINETY-TWO CARAT FORTUNE. AND IN A FEW WEEKS...



BIMMY AND ALLIE PURCHASED THEIR STEAMSHIP TICKETS AND BOARDED THEIR LINER...



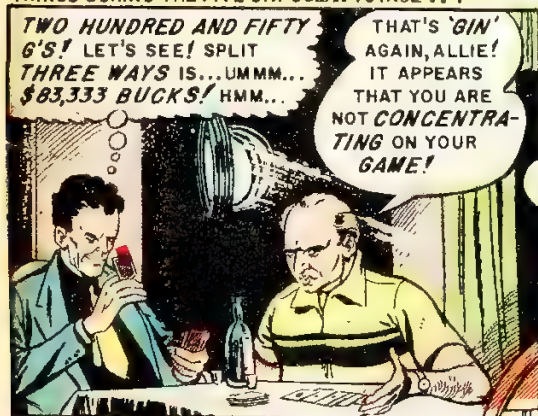
AND AFTER THEY'D SAILED, DOC SLATER MADE HIS AIRLINE RESERVATION...



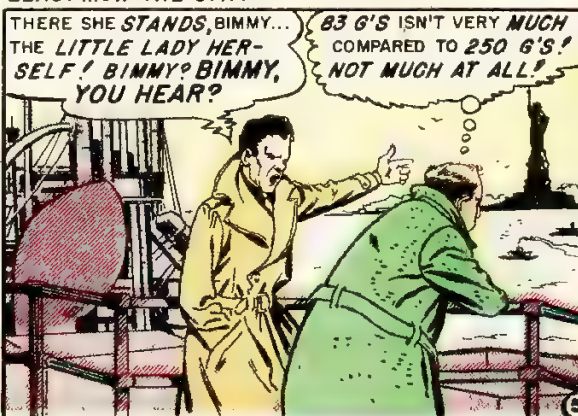
LIKE I SAID, IF YOU'RE A SMART COOKIE AND YOU PLAY YOUR CARDS RIGHT, YOU CAN MAKE A FORTUNE IN THE SMUGGLING RACKET. AND DOC SLATER WAS, INDEED, AN EXCEPTIONALLY SMART COOKIE...



DOC SLATER **KNEW** HIS BOYS. HE KNEW THEM **VERY WELL**. HE KNEW THEY'D BEGIN TO **THINK** ABOUT THINGS DURING THE FIVE DAY OCEAN VOYAGE...



BUT HE ALSO KNEW THAT THEY'D BE **HELPLESS** TO MAKE A MOVE...NOT UNTIL THEY'D **DOCKED** IN NEW YORK, AT LEAST...ON THE 8TH!



THAT'S WHY THE DOC HAD SENT THE CABLEGRAM. HE'D KNOWN THE STATE OF MIND HIS BOYS WOULD BE IN BY THE TIME THEY'D REACH HIS APARTMENT...



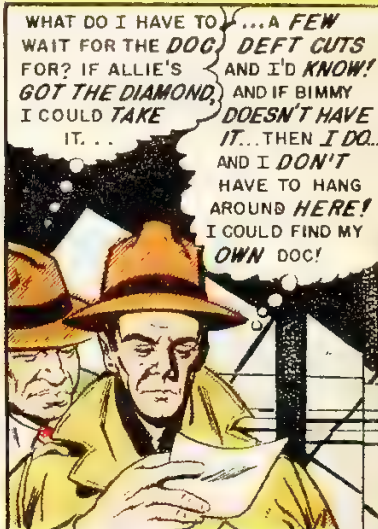
HEY, DOC! WE'RE HERE! BOIL UP THE INSTRUMENTS! WE'RE... WE'RE... LOOK, ALLIE! ON THE FLOOR!

LIKE I SAID! DOC WAS A SHARP COOKIE! THE CABLEGRAM WAS JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR'D ORDERED... AND THAT'S MEANT TO BE A CLEVER...



"RESERVATIONS FOULED UP, NOT ARRIVING TILL THE TENTH. KEEP AN EYE ON EACH OTHER FOR TWO DAYS. LOVE, DOC"

HE'D KNOWN HOW THEY'D LOOK AT EACH OTHER AND WHAT THEY'D THINK



WHAT DO I HAVE TO WAIT FOR THE DOC, FOR? IF ALLIE'S GOT THE DIAMOND, I COULD TAKE IT... A FEW DEFT CUTS AND I'D KNOW! AND IF BIMMY DOESN'T HAVE IT... THEN I DO... AND I DON'T HAVE TO HANG AROUND HERE! I COULD FIND MY OWN DOC!

THE APARTMENT GOT SUDDENLY STILL LIKE THE CROWD HERE AT THE PONY TRACK GETS JUST BEFORE THE PRICES FLASH UP ON THE 'TOTE' BOARDS. IN FACT, THE ONLY SOUND YOU COULD HEAR WAS THE METALLIC CLICK OF TWO RAZOR-SHARP SWITCH BLADES SNAPPING OPEN...



I WANT THAT DIAMOND, ALLIE... AND A ONE-WAY SPLIT! PRECISELY THE WAY I FEEL, BIMMY...

ALLIE AND BIMMY CIRCLED EACH OTHER CAUTIOUSLY, LIKE THE PHONY ACT THEM T.V. WRESTLERS PUT ON. ONLY THIS WAS NO ACT, THIS WAS FOR BIG STAKES... IF YOU WILL PARDON ANOTHER BAD PUN...



AND THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO GET IT... LEAVE US NOT HEDGE WITH WORDS. ACTIONS SPEAK... LOUDER...

I AM GLAD I WAS NOT THERE TO SEE THAT KNIFE FIGHT. I MYSELF AM SQUEEMISH AT THE SIGHT OF BLOOD. BUT I AM TOLD THAT THERE WAS MUCH SPILLED THAT DAY...



UHHHHHHH... NN NNNNGG...

I AM TOLD THAT ALLIE AND BIMMY CUT EACH OTHER TO RIBBONS TRYING TO OPEN THE NEARLY-HEALED OPERATION SCARS I AM TOLD THAT EVEN DOC, WHO HAS A STRONG STOMACH FOR THOSE THINGS, GOT VIOLENTLY ILL WHEN HE CAME HOME...



CHOKED...

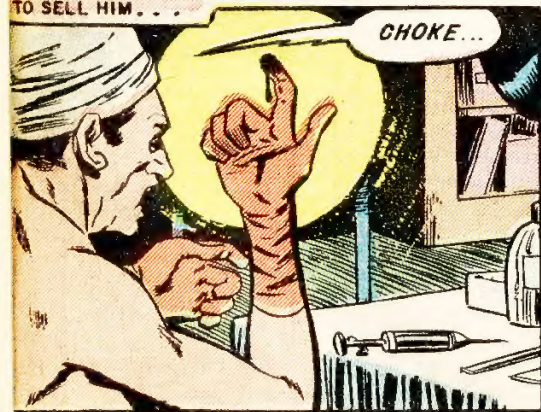
...AND SAW THEM LYING ON HIS NICE NEW LIVING-ROOM CARPET... SLASHED AND CUT AND PARTIALLY DISMEMBERED AND DEAD FROM LOSS OF BLOOD. BUT DOC GOT OVER IT QUICKLY. IN FACT, HE EVEN LAUGHED A LITTLE...



LIKE I SAID, DOC SLATER WAS A SMART COOKIE. HE'D WANTED A ONE-WAY SPLIT ALL FOR HIMSELF. HE HADN'T PACKED THAT NINETY-TWO CARAT ROCK INTO *EITHER* OF THE BOYS. HE'D OPERATED ON *HIMSELF* WHILE THEY WERE OUT COLD...



THAT'S RIGHT! A SMALL BLOB OF AS YET UNDISSOLVED PASTE... ALL THAT WAS LEFT OF THE PHONY NINETY-TWO CARAT DIAMOND THAT SMART COOKIE IN ANTWERP HAD TRIED TO SELL HIM...



BUT THERE ARE LOTS OF SMART COOKIES IN THIS WORLD, WHICH IS ONE OF THE REASONS I GAVE UP THE "FENCE" BUSINESS AND TOOK UP AN HONEST PROFESSION PUNCHING PARI-MUTUAL MACHINES...



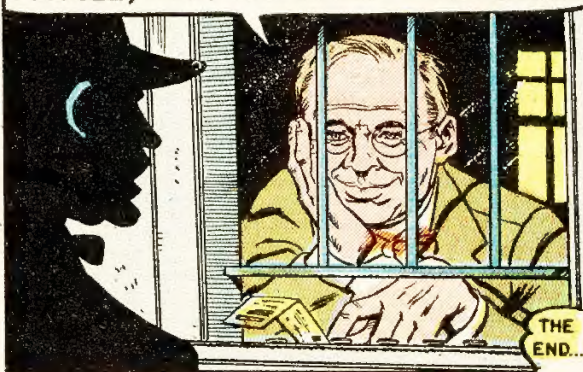
...AS HE WENT INTO HIS LABORATORY AND FILLED A HYPODERMIC WITH A LOCAL ANESTHETIC SOLUTION AND INJECTED IT INTO THE FATTY TISSUE AROUND HIS OWN NEARLY-HEALED SCAR...



BECAUSE WHEN DOC OPERATED ON HIMSELF IN NEW YORK TO REMOVE THE DIAMOND, HE FOUND...



AND THAT IS ALMOST THE END OF MY STORY. JUST ONE MORE SAD DETAIL. DOC DIED TWO WEEKS LATER! SEEMS THE PASTE USED IN THAT PHONY DIAMOND WAS POISONOUS IF IT GOT UNDER THE SKIN. WHAT'S THAT? \$200... ON MUDHOPPER... IN THE FOURTH? SUIT YOURSELF, BUDDY! THAT NAG DON'T STAND A CHANCE!



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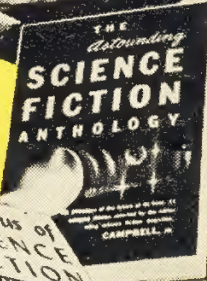
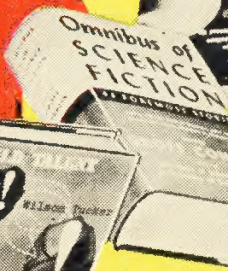
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